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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 002200

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [KPKO](#) [IZ](#) [NL](#)

SUBJECT: DUTCH GOVERNMENT DEFUSES OPPOSITION'S EFFORTS TO
MAKE AN ISSUE OUT OF IRAQ

1. Summary: At the instigation of opposition parties, a hearing on Iraq originally scheduled for September was changed to August 28 in order to put pressure on the government on the eve of the Prime Minister's visit to the U.S. The opposition claimed that the Dutch government got involved in Iraq on the basis of "unreliable" intelligence from the U.S. and UK. FM de Hoop Scheffer beat back the charges, reminding parliament that the Dutch government asked for its support based on UNSC resolution 1441 and Iraq's persistent non-compliance with previous resolutions, and that there was no question that Iraq posed a threat. The "smoking gun" of the debate was the "revelation" that the UK had provided an eyes-only intelligence assessment to PM Balkenende and the PM had not shared the information with his ministers. That item captured Dutch headlines. FM de Hoop Scheffer and Defense Minister Henk Kamp also handled questions over the safety of Dutch troops, depleted uranium, and the way forward. De Hoop Scheffer confirmed that Iraq is on the agenda in Washington, and that the Dutch wanted to exchange ideas over the UN's role. (The Dutch want a bigger role for the UN, and are especially interested in UK and U.S. ideas.) End summary.

Dispute over intelligence information

2. For weeks, the leftist opposition had tried to call the government's credibility into question by arguing that the government's decision in March to give political support to the military intervention in Iraq was possibly based on unreliable U.S. and UK intelligence information. It called for the release of the analysis of the controversial British and U.S. intelligence by the Dutch Military Intelligence Service (MIVD) so that the parliament could verify for itself whether the government made the decision to give support on the basis of slanted information. However, both De Hoop Scheffer and Kamp refused to make the requested information public. De Hoop Scheffer said he took offense at the opposition's display of distrust and emphatically denied that the government had anything to hide.

3. De Hoop Scheffer argued that UNSC resolution 1441 and Iraq's persistent failure to comply with imperative disarmament obligations imposed upon it by the UNSC had been the "decisive" factors in the GONL's decision to support the military intervention in Iraq. Intelligence merely provided "supplemental" information. Moreover, he noted that the UN had established over and over again that Iraq posed a real threat. He observed that there never was a dispute over whether Iraq possessed WMD. The dispute with the opposition was over the consequences of resolution 1441 and the timing of a military intervention. He said "the absence of proof is no proof of absence." The fact that no WMD have been found does not mean that they are or were not present. He reiterated that the GONL has always regarded resolution 1441 sufficient legitimacy for a military intervention. The purpose of this intervention was "to enforce compliance." Asked about the timing, he said the government was of the opinion in March that the Iraqi procrastination had taken "long enough."

4. Kamp said he had no reason to believe that the MIVD had tampered with information. He expressed full confidence in the MIVD's integrity and praised the quality of its daily reports. Kamp rejected as utterly inappropriate the requested release of MIVD reports because that would seriously compromise and impair the way in which the MIVD reports confidentially to the government. Besides, he added, foreign intelligence agencies must be able to rely on the fact that information passed to the MIVD is not made public via parliament.

Only Prime Minister saw classified British intelligence

5. Since the August 26 Financial Times reported that the Netherlands had been shown secret documents that served as the basis for the public British intelligence report, Labor party spokesman Koenders asked for clarification. Prompted by the same news report, De Hoop Scheffer called around and found out that the secret reports had indeed been shown to Prime Minister Balkenende and "for his eyes only." In the debate he was obliged to reveal this information and added that he was not surprised that Balkenende had not shared it

with him or Minister Kamp. After all, Balkenende was bound by secrecy. De Hoop Scheffer maintained that this had in no way influenced the GONL decision to support the war in Iraq. "A different decision would not have been taken because the Prime Minister knew what he knew." he said.

Netherlands seeks stronger UN role in Iraq

16. Reacting to parliamentary calls for a broader and stronger role for the UN in Iraq, Minister de Hoop Scheffer said the GONL was pushing for a more substantial role for the UN for the purpose of winning the peace and encouraging more countries to contribute. The aim should be to return Iraq as quickly as possible to the Iraqi people. He also expressed the wish that the UN contribute fully to the nation building process and that a renewed appeal be made to the UN members to contribute to security, including securing the UN mission in Iraq. As examples of a stronger UN contribution to the process towards a democratic, sovereign Iraq, he cited support to the constitutional process, the organization of, assistance to and monitoring of elections, as well as giving the Interim Government Council (IGC) legitimacy. He said that a small step had been made in that direction with the adoption of resolution 1500 but that the GONL favored a new UNSC resolution with a stronger mandate. He welcomed the ideas in this context raised in the press by Deputy Secretary Armitage. In an implicit rebuke of the French, de Hoop Scheffer called it essential that the EU take one line because "the European voice is only heard in the U.S. when we speak with one voice and not four or five." Limited Dutch Assistance to Iraq

17. De Hoop Scheffer explained the reasons for the GONL decision only to give limited development assistance to Iraq. Iraq is potentially a very rich country and the Netherlands only has limited resources. Both he and Kamp noted that the Dutch troops in Iraq are not relief workers. However, they do get involved in significant CIMIC projects. Kamp noted that 10 persons plus 4 DART persons are working permanently on CIMIC projects. For the moment, their budget is only 50,000 euros but De Hoop Scheffer said more funding would be available if they submit proposals for additional projects.

Depleted Uranium

18. Asked by several spokesmen about the risks to Dutch troops of exposure to depleted uranium, Minister Kamp noted that extensive scientific research has thus far not been able to prove any health hazards of such exposure. The Dutch troops have nonetheless been instructed to be cautious if they come across materiel that may contain depleted uranium. Until now, no traces of depleted uranium have been found in the area where the Dutch troops operate, Kamp added. He noted that the U.S. had initially informed the Netherlands that ammunition with depleted uranium had not been used in the last war in the Al Muthanna province where the Dutch troops are stationed. However, in response to media reports, he said he had asked the U.S. to look into the issue again.

Russel